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HOW TO TEACH THE BIBLE TO OUR CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. HENRY SEELEY.

NO. III.

IN the previous papers I have tried to avoid platitudes about the Bible, and especially to guard against those trite remarks so usually accepted, which by their speciousness appear to be truisms, though they are often veils for much inaccuracy. The incorrectness of many current phrases is the less suspected because they were originated by devout Christians.

Our space is limited, but the really useful limitation that all readers will desire is that nothing should be written but what is practical. I thankfully recognise this.

It has been shown that the Bible is not to be treated merely as a school-book. The Geography, and the Grammar, and the History, are but introductions to other books and other knowledge to be acquired through life. The Bible cannot be classed with them. Now, as a matter of fact, the only general knowledge of the Scriptures possessed by thousands, was obtained in the same way as other general book knowledge. The Spelling-book, the Latin Grammar, Euclid, and the rest of the school-books are gladly thrown aside as soon as "those horrid lessons" come to an end. Even on these terms, though parents and teachers would prefer better, the lessons have to be learnt until they are done, and a measure of knowledge more or less useful, and often indispensable, remains permanently stored in the mind. But the Word of God must have a different estimate if its real use is to be known by our children.

Anything that can rescue the Bible lesson from the sense of tiresomeness that children attribute to their other lessons, will be hailed by those who would secure the right regard for

holy things. Although one has scant patience with the craze of our time that children must be taught by way of amusement, and that the motive of stern duty must be kept in the background, yet if learning can be made entertaining without detriment to the principle and habit of doing what is right because we *must*, surely we have a great gain.

If the Bible has become the friend of the little child, he will treat it in his school days with the reverence that comes from a right familiarity, and not with the dislike or contempt that proverbially springs from familiarity of a different kind. In the home, therefore, let there grow up the best kind of association between God's *Word* and God's *Day*. To begin with the age when picture-books are specially required, and bearing in mind the cautions already given, such books as the "Sunday Picture Book" of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, in several series, and particularly No. 3 on Scripture Natural History, may be recommended as very useful favourites. Then for the little one who has begun to read there are many books good on the whole, both in letterpress and pictures, such as "Bible Stories in Simple Language for Little Children." (Frederick Warne and Co.) Most of the pictures in this book are excellent. Children a little older can use "The Child's Bible." (Cassell and Co.) The very title, and the method of omission, suggest wise parental explanations as to what the book professes to be. Then we have another mode of combining amusement and accurate learning, in the series of sheets for text-painting, and afterwards for reference-finding, entitled "Something for Sunday," and "Happy Sunday Afternoons" (both published by J. F. Shaw and Co.) These painted texts may well be given away by the young artists to poor people who like them for their cottage walls. Then we can advance to the use of Scripture Searching Almanacs, in which texts are printed, and the chapter and verse are to be found and written in; or a manuscript book may be kept for the purpose, the texts being chosen and written in, with spaces for the reference to be inserted. Bible questions and puzzles abound in magazines, though care is required in their use, that holy words and things may not be brought down to the level of common riddles; and the merriment of fun, as distinguished from that of a holy delight, must be kept away.

I have mentioned these things as though they were for Sunday. There is no reason why any or all of them should not be available for week-days, but such occupations are specially valuable in making "the Sabbath a delight," a great object in itself, and not to be solved in any sense by introducing the week-day element, and thus weakening and abbreviating the day which may easily become to little children "the best of all the seven." Both in families and schools, the learning of lessons on that day ought not to be a matter of irksome drudgery. There are better ways of obtaining the result we aim at, viz:—the learning of the Word of God. If we can create an appetite and relish for its subject-matter, the learning will hardly be looked upon as a task. I am not convinced of the wisdom of giving children Scripture portions of any length to be "got by heart," or rather "rote," heartlessly enough, on the Lord's Day. A good substitute for this is often practicable; let the child read, carefully and intelligently, the chosen portion every morning and evening through the week, and he will usually be ready to repeat it on Sunday to his father. I knew a mother who tried this plan for years with success; a hymn and the collect were also read, and the pleasant reading, made to be a punctual, reverent, and happy duty, went by the name of "a little of Sunday every day." A man who has from childhood known and loved the Bible is the man who always enjoyed Sunday; and, convertibly, a Sabbath well spent involves the life-long regard for the Bible, which has always been specially associated with it.

I cannot recommend too strongly the membership of the Scripture Union. If there is no local branch in existence, the family might itself become one. Full information may be had from the Children's Special Service Mission, of which Mission also, in all its departments of work, I desire to speak highly, and particularly in its bearing on our subject. Parents would do well to obtain particulars from the Secretaries, 13A, Warwick Lane, E.C.

For a series of texts to learn, I know of no better selection than the celebrated "One Hundred Texts of the Society for Irish Church Missions." The sheet of references may be had at 11, Buckingham Street, Strand, W.C.

Children healthily and brightly brought up in the nurture

and admonition of the Lord, love to get into *the way of handling the Bible*. The searching for topics, names of men, places, animals, the voluntary use of references and maps, all increase the child's grasp of the whole book. It is well for a family to have a *large* concordance at hand for its Sunday work, and let writing paper and slates be freely used. Children should be made to learn the names of the books in the order usually given; the nature of the grouping should be explained briefly—Books of Moses, History, Poetry, Prophets, Gospels, &c.; and the wise use of references, marginal readings, and dates should be suitably encouraged. "Broad surfaces" of scripture may be dealt with under the guidance of a sensible teacher; for instance, the personal history of Daniel may be studied as a whole, and not as a mere string of detached anecdotes.

There is a capital little eightpenny book published by the Religious Tract Society, entitled "The Bible Reader's Help, for the use of plain people, and the young in families and schools." Parents and teachers would certainly value it, and even young children are glad to be allowed to use it, as much of it is interesting to them. The new edition of the Oxford "Helps to the Study of the Bible," with its British Museum and other pictures, "comprising summaries of the several books, with copious explanatory notes and tables illustrative of scripture history and the characteristics of Bible lands, embodying the results of the most recent researches," is extremely useful, and will profitably amuse children of eleven and twelve, though of course it is intended for adults. It is recommended as a considerable aid in teaching the Bible. It may be had for a few pence.

There is a tendency to make the Bible seem a crabbed book by the unwise use of "Helps," and really useful books now commonly found in good schools are calculated to leave the impression not easily removed, that the Bible is a book to be got up for examinations by "cramming," and that in after life most of it may be left as the special study of the clergy. There is therefore need of great judgment in the selection and the mode of using handbooks, commentaries, and other books about the Bible. Canon Girdlestone's little shilling book, one of the Religious Tract Society present day primers, "How to study the English Bible,"

carefully read by the teacher, would enable him to give a child much useful information that would make his school books far more intelligible than they would be without such aid. It is in our childhood that we learn *how to use our books*. This is an invaluable art, and in proportion as we acquire it, our power of getting knowledge in after life is greater.

Many of the questions commonly asked about the text of the Bible, and the history of the book, are answered in Dr. Paterson Smyth's shilling book, "How we got our Bible." (Bagster and Sons).

There are many works to be had by teachers who desire accurate and suggestive thoughts for their own use, and to assist them in teaching. Among these may be mentioned for the study of the gospels, "Our Lord's Life on Earth," by Dr. Hanna, and Mr. Eugene Stock's Notes of Sunday School Lessons. And parents and teachers may largely increase their own stores of biblical knowledge by the perusal of certain books that are often supposed to be mainly useful for ordination examinations, as for instance, Paley's "Horae Paulinae," and the kindred book Blunt's "Undesigned Coincidences." These books lead to exact and thoughtful reading of the bible. The books called "The Life of Christ" are numerous. Their serviceableness is impaired, and they not infrequently do harm, by their very scope, which usually tends to separate the manhood from the Deity. We must beware of even seeming to put asunder what God has joined together.

Of many present day commentaries, and this touches the question of school handbooks, there are some characteristic remarks in Dean Burgon's excellent Treatise on the Pastoral Office. He writes, on Acts viii. 31, "The Ethiopian understood *the text* of Isaiah liii. 7, 8 (the sense, I mean, of the prophet's words), as well as Philip the Evangelist. Accordingly, his question was—'I pray thee, *of whom speaketh the prophet this?* of himself, or of some other man?' He did not invoke the aid of a philosopher. A 'guide,' as he himself declared, *an interpreter* of scripture, was what he wanted. Is it not plain, therefore, that an engraving of the scene of the incident referred to—a dissertation on the geographical limits of Ethiopia—a note to inform us that

the second syllable in 'Candace' is short, together with a vignette of the kind of chariot in which the eunuch was possibly sitting, and of the kind of roll in which he was probably reading, as well as of a coin (if it existed) of Queen Candace herself:—is it not plain I say, that illustrations of this kind, however ably executed and set off with all the graces of a graphic pen, instead of admitting us to a share in Philip's discourse, do *not nearly* put us moderns on a level with the meanest slave who waited on the Ethiopian, and in stupid wonder observed the scene at a distance? Who does not see that the work of interpretation is still to come, when helps of this class have been multiplied to any extent?"

We have thus reached another stage of our subject.